

District Court judge: Kathren, Burrowes

District Court races are among the toughest for voters to decide, and some of the most important. The winners hear hundreds of cases affecting the lives of ordinary citizens.

We're offering our recommendations today, but the best advice is to get all of the information you can. Talk to your friends, visit the websites, watch the candidates on TV -- and read the Herald's recommendation, of course.

Kathren vs. Ekstrom

It's unusual to have an open seat on the bench because once judges are elected, they tend to stay in that job for many years -- often without a challenger.

With Judge Holly Hollenbeck's retirement, two candidates have stepped forward for the vacant Benton County District Court seat. Both are qualified. The decision will be difficult.

Our interview, research and deliberations have led us to recommend Dan Kathren.

Both candidates have spent plenty of time in the courtroom, although we think the edge goes to Kathren because he has been a judge pro tem for the past 10 years. His opponent's experience has been mostly as an attorney and most recently as an assistant U.S. district attorney.

Both candidates have strong endorsements, but the edge here goes to Ekstrom. He has more votes of confidence from the legal community, although Kathren has solid supporters as well.

Another thing we liked about Kathren is his list of specific ideas for increasing the efficiencies of the court system.

It was a close call for us, but the deciding factor is Kathren's community service. He is busy in the community and has been for many years.

He serves on several boards and not the high-profile, low-workload boards that can pad a resume. These are boards like Meals on Wheels and the Substance Abuse Coalition.

Here is a man who has proved himself as a community servant.

A judge needs to be legally competent and have a sound understanding of the court system. He or she should be fair and compassionate.

As a bonus, Kathren is a leader in the community.

The Herald editorial board recommends Dan Kathren for District Court Judge, Position 3.

Burrowes vs. Petersen

We sensed some animosity between Joe Burrowes and Dave Petersen during their meeting with the Herald's editorial board.

Maybe it was just the normal tension that's present whenever two competitors for the same elected position face off.

Whatever it was, we didn't share it. Rather, we found both men to possess the training and temperament required to be an effective District Court judge.

Petersen has more than 10 years experience as a judge pro tem in district and municipal court. He was a deputy prosecutor for two years before going into private practice.

We were also impressed by his record of community service. Petersen's efforts to help provide legal services to low-income people, for example, earned him the Benton Franklin Legal Aid Society's Al Yencopal Award.

But Petersen's fine qualities don't make a convincing argument for unseating Burrowes.

Burrowes spent two years as a court commissioner before being appointed District Court judge in 2009. In all, he has spent 24 years in the legal system, including stints in law enforcement, the prosecutor's office and as a defense attorney.

Experience isn't everything, but in this race it turned out to be the deciding factor for the editorial board.

Burrowes has a reputation for delivering justice with a measure of compassion. His style is a good fit for District Court, where so many defendants are traffic offenders getting their first exposure to our judicial system.

We're especially impressed by the number of judicial officials endorsing Burrowes. From state Supreme Court justices down to municipal court commissioners, the list of endorsements from sitting judges would fill a page.

We share their trust in Burrowes' ability to handle this important job.

The Herald editorial board recommends Joe Burrowes for District Court Judge, Position 4.

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